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out Botticelli's charm, though perhaps he does not emphasize sufficiently its morbid features, and thus, as throughout his book, occupies that safe balanced position which is indicative of serene culture. The appearance of such a volume ought to be hailed with satisfaction by all who are interested in the development of Southern literature. W. P. T.

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WELLS'S MODERN FRENCH FICTION.

A CENTURY OF FRENCH FICTION. By Benjamin W. Wells, Ph.D.  
New York: Dodd, Mead & Co. 1898.

Professing to be a study of novels, not of novelists, this book of criticism is not only well worth reading, but one that can get itself read by any one who begins it to the last word on the last page. It wastes no space with irrelevant gossip, so usually deemed an important part of literary discussions; yet it never fails to furnish a spiritual portrait of each author of importance with whose works it deals; a portrait not of the citizen, the friend, the lover, the man of the world, but of the novelist as such. Dr. Wells is a reader who can give himself and others a clear account of what he has enjoyed or, as the case may be, suffered. His synopsis of a complex novel is wonderfully succinct, yet vital. He seizes the central thought, the essential features of the situation, the inmost soul of a character. Clear-sighted, no fair hypocrisies can easily dupe him, even if now and then he may wink one eye and pretend not to see. Scholar though he is, he sees no harm in cracking a nut full of humorous meat; in cracking a nut wittily empty. He will pin an epithet wickedly delightful to the coat tails of a vulgar noun that struts along unconscious of its absurdity. While you contemplate the quiet constellations in his critical sky, he will shoot off a rocket of paradox, to the momentary disgust of the stars of the first magnitude and the confusion of the heavenly-minded. But this freedom, boyishness, waggery, is no evidence of levity. He is deeply in earnest. But he has the unusual courtesy not to assume that our patience and erudition are as unfailing and well disciplined as his. Indeed, he makes light of

his accomplishments to set us at our ease with him, and magnifies the gift of laughter, because in all probability we share it with him in fairly equal degree. Let no one be so unmannerly as to take foul advantage of his graciousness or good humor. Dr. Wells has shown us in two chapters what he can do at a pinch: those first two chapters on Balzac's "development" and "maturity," so likely to terrify him who has not read, and to exasperate him who has, by their over fullness of fact!

If any fault is to be found with Dr. Wells as a critic, it is that he, like all who have lived intensely, is a succession of men, but that each of them has been in turn too deferential to his predecessors. Each dog has his day, but he ought not to have more. All popes are infallible, yet we are disposed to commend them for not speaking more than one at a time *ex cathedra*. Remember the scandal of Avignon! So it is well that the critic should note for the reader's edification whether a particular judgment is uttered by his living soul, or comes from the lips of some specter self that haunts the chambers of his memory. Ere dealing with things substantial it is no more than right to ascertain whether one be in the body or out of the body. To be specific: poisons in Gautier, because we have attained to years of great discretion, and are likely to survive even a larger dose, shall not be deemed deleterious? The food value of his romances shall not be depreciated thereby? But the poisons in "Chateaubriand," because they have lost for us their power of unhealthy stimulation, and act now depressingly, shall be grewsomely labeled with scarlet skull and bones? So be it. Here is a judgment of maturity. In both cases the immoral element has been looked at from the same point of view. Yet, for our part, we should observe, poisons that injure the young only are no less toxic than poisons that vex the sage adult. We are delighted with his blunt manliness, calling a fool a fool, even if he wore fine apparel. Calamities that are brought upon the hero and heroine by cowardice and lack of good sense do not deserve to be flooded with tears. Not a whole del-

uge of tears can change comic stuff into tragic material—it can only drown the fun. Yet our sturdy critic feels a tenderness for George Sand! Why? Probably a dead enthusiasm haunts his living judgment, and the ghost has hypnotized the man! Others who have sinned no worse than she cannot throw sand in his eye; why let them throw Sand in his teeth?

But this amounts, after all, only to an assertion that the unity of the book is more mechanical than psychological. Taken as a series of essays, each having its own perspective—sometimes the same as others and sometimes not—we can only confess that here is a scholarly book, a vigorous book, a witty book, a whimsical book, one that will not only “repay a reading”—that is, discharge the principal of its debt as an honest book—but generously count out in good gold a larger interest than even a usurer could have expected.

WILLIAM NORMAN GUTHRIE.